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ABSTRACT

Before establishing a public relations program for disabled persons, it is essential to understand their needs and capabilities, involve these persons in the planning, know what state and community programs are available in the area, and define a fundamental purpose for the program. Knowing editors and writers at local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations and preparing honest, concise statements are basic to the effective use of such promotional devices as press releases, press conferences, media appearances, and speeches. Other public relations techniques that can assist a program for the disabled include the use of photograph displays, open houses, job fairs, media interviews of handicapped persons, book and author promotions, media job announcements for the handicapped, speaker bureaus, dedications of public buildings, community thank-you messages, meetings with officials from the community, public service announcements, and awards. Because the promotion of a public relations program requires competitive public service advertising, money sources or volunteer services must be solicited. Possible resources for donated publicity materials include local university art departments, private advertising or public relations firms, and public interest organizations. (MAI)

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Producing a Public Relations Program for Disabled Adults

The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped Washington, D.C. 20210

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Introduction

Why public relations? Who needs it? Can a good public relations program benefit disabled men and women?

Legitimate questions which should be carefully considered. Much of the general public's awareness of disabled people today is based on telethons, poster children and other fund-raising attempts. While funds for services for disabled people are undeniably needed, the image created by these efforts is largely one of dependency and need.

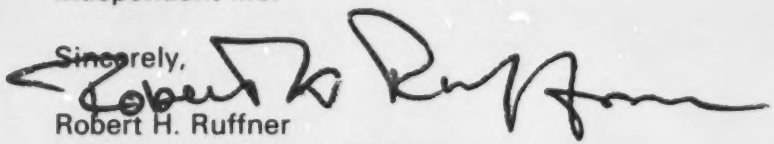
There is another side to the coin. Disabled men and women are leading full and independent lives throughout the United States. They go to schools, jobs, buy homes and cars, participate in community activities, rear children, laugh and cry. Sound familiar? It should. The other side of the coin is that disabled men and women are first and foremost people — just like other people. This humane quality should be the base of any public relations program dealing with disabled people. A sensitive and strong PR program can raise money, service needs of disabled people, and, at the same time, recognize

the contributions that disabled people are making in their communities while recognizing their humanity.

The fact is . . . and today this is far too unrecognized by the general public . . . that disabled people make good neighbors, good friends, good employees, good citizens.

A continuing major problem for disabled people is the lack of opportunities to participate fully in our society. This is where a good public relations program can help, and that's the purpose of this guide: to help disabled people and organizations concerned with disabled people to produce public relations programs which can help create the opportunities which disabled adults need to fully realize the goal of an independent life.

Sincerely,



Robert H. Ruffner
Director of Communications

Some Important Considerations

Disabled people are people, not dehumanized abstractions such as "the handicapped".

Watch your language. Disabled people are people, not dehumanized abstractions such as "the handicapped." Be sensitive using language which accurately describes the people about whom you are talking: a deaf woman; a group of handicapped people; a student who is blind; a worker who is in a wheelchair. Not very difficult to do, but much more specific and humane.

Disabled people should represent themselves. If your organization provides services to disabled people, arrange to have recipients of these services do the talking about the services to the public. If you need to raise money, don't forget that the end result of the services which your fundraising organization provides are independent disabled men and women. Find them and ask them to appear on your telethons and in your other fundraising activities. People who have used your services are the best possible testimony to the effectiveness of your services. This applies across the board: disabled speakers should be booked for television and radio talk show

appearances; disabled people should be interviewed by the press; disabled people should be involved in every aspect of any agency dealing with disabled people.

Disabled people are not supermen. Don't oversell disabled people for then you only create a "difference" which, after all, we are sincerely trying to overcome. If disabled men and women are just like everyone else, then, it doesn't stand to reason that they can possibly be "more loyal", "more diligent", "more etc."

Disabled people are not sick. Of course, disabled people get sick, like everyone else. But in their normal, healthy day-to-day lives, they are just as "well" as anyone. Using a wheelchair, or having no sight, does not mean that a person is "sick." It's simply a fact of life, like people who wear dentures, or have red hair, or any other human characteristic.

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Planning a Public Relations Program

If you don't have disabled people actively participating in your organization, form an advisory council of disabled people and start recruiting disabled people as employees.

Know what your organization can offer to disabled people and to the general public. If you are in a small group of disabled people, what is the purpose of your getting together? Are you providing social outlets, any services such as wheelchair repair, job referral, information on the availability of services within your community. Whatever group you are with, know the strengths and weaknesses of the group. If you cannot provide information, don't claim that you can. If you don't have disabled people actively participating in your organization, form an advisory council of disabled people and start recruiting disabled people as employees. Know the program and services and people you want to include in a public relations program. Recognize your limitations and potential before going "public."

Know the facts about your community. How many disabled people live in your community? How many people are served by the Federal/State Vocational Rehabilitation program? How

many disabled veterans are in programs of the Veterans' Administration? How many disabled workers were placed by your State's public employment service? How many sheltered workshops are in your community; what are their problems and their placement rates? What other kinds of programs are available in your community for disabled people: housing (including halfway houses and independent living programs); education (what is your school system doing: what about innovative programs for disabled students in local colleges and high schools; how accessible are the schools in your community); job training programs (is your community including disabled people in CETA-funded job training programs; what other programs in job training are available); what State and community programs are available for disabled people?

... is your community including disabled people in CETA-funded job training programs?

Producing a Public Relations Program

. . . determine what it is you really want to go "public" with.

You know your facts about your agency and your community. You're ready to start. Now, determine what it is you really want to go "public" with. Is it your agency's services? Or is it to recruit new disabled members to your organization? Perhaps it is to open a new half-way house for people who are leaving State mental institutions?

Know what you want to accomplish and then . . .

Use Your Facts Honestly.

Among these facts are any number of good stories, articles for the newspapers, news items for television and radio, interview possibilities.

Getting the Word Out.

Know your local editors and writers at newspapers, radio and television stations. This is a basic step. Editors and writers who know you are able to better appreciate the stories, press releases and ideas you pass on to them. News people are like

anybody else. They want to know their sources of information. So, get to know them. Call them up, drop by and see them, have lunch with them. Disabled people have been ignored too long, often because the people who write the news don't know them. Arrange interviews and talkshows for disabled people. This means that organizations working with disabled people must know disabled people well, know their strengths and weaknesses, know who is an effective communicator, and, then, promote them to your contacts in the press, radio and tv.

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Basic Promotional Hints

1. Press Releases: be sure that you have something to say and say it clearly and simply. If you've done your fact finding, you'll have many things to say. Remember to type your release, include your name and telephone as the contact person. Get your information clearly in the opening paragraph. Use only one side of a sheet of paper. Never send sloppy or

carbon copies. Keep your release to the minimum (you're not writing the "great American novel", you're writing a release.)

2. Marketing Your Press Releases: have a good press list which includes editors of daily papers (use the name of the editor), weekly newspapers, wire service (AP & UPI) in your community, magazine and company publication editors, editors of private and public agencies' publications interested in disabled people, public information officers of agencies concerned with disabled people, editors of disabled consumer publications, radio and television news or assignment editors, hosts of talk shows, and public service directors at radio and tv stations. Keep your list up-to-date and always use names whenever possible. Don't neglect to send your releases to the proper editor. If you have a "hard" news story, an event which would make the front pages or the evening tv news, send it to the City Editor or the News Director. If, however, your story is a "feature", send it to the appropriate editor (sports, style, women, etc.).

3. Press Conferences: be certain that the conference is necessary and that it will generate news of interest to reporters and editors; be sure to let the editors and reporters know in advance that the outcome will benefit them in their news gathering (if you can't explain satisfactorily in advance, forget your press conference); give editors plenty of advance notice of the conference to suit the needs of the news media you are inviting (evening tv news programs need their news in the morning while morning newspapers need theirs in the afternoon or early evening); put together a press kit of pertinent materials, brief the person holding the conference so that he or she knows exactly what is expected (you can play reporter in doing this and generate the kinds of questions that a reporter would); make sure your microphones and other equipment work; make a list of all of these items and any others which occur to you to insure that everything goes smoothly to best meet the needs of the reporters (such things as coffee, back-up experts who can elaborate on the main

. . . make a list . . . to insure that everything goes smoothly to best meet the needs of the reporters.

Speak simply, concisely and sincerely about your subject.

speaker's points, inviting information officers from concerned agencies, following-up with the reporters who didn't attend by sending the press kit, etc.)

4. Radio and Television Appearances. Be yourself, don't imitate others. Be informed, do your homework and know what you want to say. Be prepared for questions from left field; talk shows are interested in personalities and talk show hosts are going to try to find the "real" you — so stay on top of it and relax.

5. Speeches. Do your homework, either write it out entirely or make notes of your key points. Keep it brief and watch your audience for reaction. Use films and slide presentations only if they will stimulate interest and fit your subject. Don't wander, you'll be doing well if you can get across one idea in a speech. Speak simply, concisely and sincerely about your subject. **Know** your subject . . . back to facts!

6. Photographs. Avoid shots of people with glasses in hand

and those which have someone presenting something to someone else. Get the photograph in close for human shots and be sure that your captions are accurate and indicate who is on the left, etc. SPELL names correctly.

Other Public Relations Ideas . . .

Open Houses. Arrange open houses at sheltered workshops, rehabilitation centers, hospitals, halfway houses, schools.

Job Fairs. Arrange a job fair to bring disabled jobseekers together with employers and community service agencies.

Radio-TV Interviews. Handicapped people discussing their lives and jobs, employers who hire disabled people discussing their experiences, mock job interviews offering tips to both disabled people seeking work and to employers seeking disabled employees.

Book and Author Promotions. Promotion of books by and about disabled people at book or department stores, author

luncheons, interviews and panel discussions, reviews of these books in newspapers.

Radio-TV Job Announcements. Employers and employment services phoning in available jobs to radio and television stations on the air.

Speaker Bureaus. Speakers, particularly disabled people, scheduled to speak at civic, social, service and other meetings.

Dedications. Ceremonies at accessible buildings and businesses and recreation areas.

Community Thank-You. Lunch, banquet, reception, media announcements, direct mail, thanking the community for its support of disabled people.

Special Newspaper Section. Sponsored by employers and agencies which work with disabled people, and including job-wanted and job-available ads, success stories, community

stories, problems in the community.

Meeting with Officials. Groups of disabled people meeting with city council, State legislators, other lawmakers to outline needs and possible solutions.

Public Service Announcements. Develop written, filmed or recorded public service announcements of 30 seconds in length (some radio and television stations also like 60 second announcements) about your services, your organization, your contribution to disabled people. Time your announcements carefully and deliver them to the public service director at local radio and television stations. Public service directors are often willing to discuss their public service announcement needs and desires with you and can be invaluable resources in developing radio/tv public service announcements.

Awards. Use awards to honor disabled men and women in your community who have made outstanding contributions as citizens, or who are distinguished in working and speaking

Time your announcements carefully and deliver them to the public service director at local radio and television stations.

...write a proclamation for your mayor, or governor and arrange to have it signed with photographs and radio and television crews to record the event for the public.

out for disabled people. Use awards to honor employers and educators and city managers and transit authorities and architects and all others who have made contributions to creating opportunities for disabled men and women.

Display. Use simple displays of photographs of disabled men and women at work, at play, at home, for use in that greatest of all display places—your local public library. Help arrange art exhibits of disabled artists in your library; help your library arrange a mini-festival of films and books about disabled people. Help your library help disabled adults.

Proclaim. If you want a special day designated as your community's "recognition of disabled adults" day or a special week such as architectural barriers awareness week (May), National Employ the Handicapped Week (first full week of October), write a proclamation for your mayor, or governor and arrange to have it signed with photographs and radio and television crews to record the event for the public.

Demonstrate. If there are seemingly insoluble situations in your community which discriminate against disabled adults, organize a peaceful demonstration or take to the media with your story. Some examples of demonstrations which have attracted a great deal of media attention are tours of City Halls and shopping centers where local and State officials use wheelchairs, crutches, blindfolds, etc., to simulate disability and to discover first-hand what accessibility problems mean to disabled people.

Use Ideas. If you think you have found a good story about disabled people, talk it over with a writer who seems to have an interest in disabled people. How to find such a writer? Easy, read your local newspapers and clip articles concerning disabled people and note the name of the reporter. If you find, and you probably will, a reporter who has several articles about disabled people and who writes impartially as far as you're concerned, you've probably found a contact who

If you find . . . a reporter who has several articles about disabled people . . . you've probably found a contact who would be interested in developing more stories on disabled people.

Encourage local businesses to include disabled people in their regular advertising.

would be interested in developing more stories on disabled people. Look, listen and act.

A good tip is to write letters to reporters either thanking them for their stories and taking issue with them if you feel the need (be sure and send a copy of your letter to the editor.) Keep in touch with reporters and editors and public service directors at newspapers, radio and television stations and let them know of your continued interest in their stories on disabled people.

Advertise. Encourage local businesses to include disabled people in their regular advertising. Many companies are now legally required to take "affirmative action" in hiring and promoting disabled people and most universities and public school systems must provide services for disabled people. Encourage all of these groups to advertise their programs, facilities and products of interest to disabled people.

Letters to the Editor. Write them, they're read. Remember

that many radio and television stations also accept "letters to the editor." Suggest ideas for editorial treatment — things such as special commemorative events; discrimination against disabled people in your community; housing and transportation problems facing disabled adults.

Newsletters. Write, produce and distribute to all interested members of your organization, the media and the general public lively, informative newsletters on what your agency or group is doing for — and with — disabled adults. Use photographs where possible; do as professional a job as you possibly can. Keep your newsletter focused on your agency's concerns and don't ramble.

Organize. A small group of writers, editors and advertising people drawn from the community to advise you on your public relations efforts.

Promoting a Public Relations Program

You've now planned and produced a public relations program. You've made a good start and suddenly you find yourself wanting to make more of an impact on the general public and you realize that you should be making public service advertisements for newspapers and radio and television and you want to . . . but, you don't have the money.

Money. Many of the ideas discussed in the "Producing a Public Relations Program" section can be effectively handled with little or no money. A lot of talking, a lot of listening, a lot of persuading, a lot of shoe leather. But now you've realized that your organization can provide more services than you had thought, or you feel that you're really not reaching disabled people, or that you really aren't making an impact on the general public, or . . . .

It takes money. Attractive, competitive public service advertisements take money. But maybe, with more persuasion, you can promote and expand your public relations

program by cooperation, by knocking on the right door, you may find the talents and energies you need to turn your ideas for public service materials into realities.

Universities. What a resource for small agencies working with disabled people! Universities have art departments which can produce posters, advertisements for newspapers and magazines, letterhead design to enrich your agency's appearance, a whole bag of arts and graphics services which just might be devoted to your ideas for a quarter or a semester as a class project. The University gains by exposing students to real life situations. You gain by collecting fine public service materials.

Universities also have public relations and journalism departments which can produce entire P.R. campaigns as class projects and provide students to interview disabled people, to write press releases with you, to help you promote your P.R. program.

. . . by knocking on the right door, you may find talents and energies you need to turn your ideas for public service materials into realities.

Sometimes, a private ad agency can be persuaded to take on a "freebie" . . .

Many universities have film departments which can produce television spot announcements. Many have radio stations which can produce recorded radio spot announcements for your public service placement.

Universities. Art schools. Senior high schools. Vocational schools. A wealth of resources waiting for you to come to them with ideas for cooperative programs.

Advertising Agencies. Advertising agencies regularly produce materials for all the media for their clients. Sometimes, a private ad agency can be persuaded to take on a "freebie", a public interest program which will be produced without cost. Sometimes, but it's certainly worth a try.

And, there are private public relations agencies which will do the same for small groups. Often, commercial radio and television stations produce public service materials for small public interest organizations without charge.

Other Organizations. Don't limit your sights or your interests solely to those other organizations and agencies working with disabled adults. In your community are a number of public interest organizations working for other groups of people. Contact these organizations and work out cooperative efforts. Working together, you both can gain and realize fuller attention for both of your interests.

Individuals. Find yourself a community "star" who will take a personal interest in your organization and efforts and help you realize your public relations program. A "star" can be a community leader in politics, education, theater, television, radio, publishing, almost any field.

You'll think of other community resources once you get started if you'll only remember . . . cooperate, cooperate, cooperate.

In your community are a number of public interest organizations working for other groups of people. Contact these organizations and work out cooperative efforts.

Producing a Public Relations Program for Disabled Adults has been brought to you by The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped to assist you in gaining recognition for your agency or group working with disabled adults creating opportunities for disabled men and opportunities for disabled men and women.

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